

NASA-LaRC SAFETY NEWSLETTER

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SKIN DISORDERS - NO WORKER IS IMMUNE

We all have skin - the source of tens of thousands of reported illnesses every year, in every job and industry. Most skin problems probably aren't even reported, but they still make up the second most common category of occupational illness (after cumulative trauma disorders).

Common skin problems include:

* *Dermatosis* - Rashes, itchiness, acne, redness, cracking, peeling or flaking, etc. are often an immediate reaction to contact with a chemical or other irritant. Many of these symptoms disappear soon after contact stops, but some people become sensitized to a particular substance and have an allergic-type reaction each time they are exposed to it.

* *Cuts, bruises, punctures, and abrasions* - When blows, pressure, or friction open the skin, infection becomes a definite added risk.

* *Temperature reactions* - Very hot or very cold conditions can create problems ranging from heat rash to frostbite.

* *Burns* - Heat and chemicals can both burn the skin and, in worst cases, the tissue below.

Prevention

The prevention of skin problems should fit the situation and the individual, but good hygiene, sensible work practices, and protective clothing will generally do the job. The following practices are basic:

* *Recognize risks* - Skin problems can result from any type of task. Even common items like paint or rubber gloves can cause skin irritations or allergies.

* *Prevent direct contact with hazardous materials* - Proper storage, handling, and disposal of hazardous materials are essential.

* *Use personal protective equipment* - All parts of the skin that could be exposed should be covered. Inspect protective gear regularly for rips or holes. At LaRC, several types of gloves (neoprene, latex, butyl, rubber, etc.) are in stock to prevent problems. Consult your supervisor or the Industrial Hygiene Office for the proper glove for your application.

* *Keep work areas clean and neat* - Helps prevent falls, contact with sharp objects, dust related problems, etc. Keep containers of hazardous materials closed.

* *Practice good personal hygiene* - Washing hands regularly and thoroughly is the best and easiest way to prevent skin disease. Use soap or cleaning agents, not solvents (often skin irritants themselves). Showers may be needed after working with hazardous substances.

* *Know first aid* - Report any skin problem to your supervisor and take prompt and proper action for burns, cuts, etc. Skin that has been exposed to hazardous substances or other irritants should be washed immediately. Get medical attention at the clinic for any work related skin problem that persists.

Excerpts from BLR OSHA Training Bulletin for Supervisors, July 1992.